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- - D R A F T - -

Dear Colleagues:

Here are some preliminary comments on the Roscoe White Story - Echoes of No Conspiracy?

This story surfaced as I was starting a vacation trip to Seattle. I have now had a little time to think about it, and to look over the clippings and other material which many people kindly sent me. Partly in response to those of who you wrote or called asking my opinions, I'm sending out this very rough compilation of comments to about 30 people. I would appreciate additional information, analysis, and clippings.

I assume you know the basic story - that Ricky White (who was 3 in 1963) is convinced (largely on the basis of a now-missing diary) that his father Roscoe, then a Dallas policeman, was the grassy knoll gunman. (If you need copies of any of the sources mentioned here, just ask for them.)

When I can, I'll put together an issue of EOC and say something about all this (although I'm strongly tempted not to waste any more time on this). Before I do that, I would particularly appreciate hearing from anyone with additional information, or reasons why I should take the central claim of this story at all seriously. (I don't have in mind general arguments about how well it fits with what we already allegedly know.)

In case you're wondering: the last EOC was November 1989. I haven't retired, but I'm spending more time and energy on my programming job, and I would like to spend more of my JFK-case time on research and analysis, not trying to keep up with the ongoing tide of information, much of which ranges from unproductive to silly.

First, let's focus on the alleged cables to White. They are quoted in full by Earl Golz in the Austin American-Statesman story which started the media flurry (#1; see list of sources below.) The latest is as follows:

Navy Int.
Code A MRC
Remark data
1666106
NRC VDC NAC
Dec. 63

Remarks Mandarin: Code G:

Stay within department, witnesses have eyes, ears, and mouths. You (illegible) do of the mix up. The men will be in to cover up all misleading evidence soon. Stay as planned wait for further orders.

C. Bowers

RE - rifle Code AAA destroy/on

The other two, with similar identifying notations, are dated respectively "(illegible). 63" and "Sept. 63":

"Foreign affairs assignments have been cancelled. The next assignment is to eliminate a National Security threat to world wide peace. Destination will be Houston, Austin or Dallas. Contacts are being arranged now. Orders are subject to change at any time. Reply back if not understood."

"Dallas destination chosen. Your place hidden within the department. Contacts are within this letter. Continue on as planned."

There are a limited number of interpretations of these items. The main possibilities seem to be these:

They are genuine documents relating to White's role in the JFK assassination, and thus perhaps the most important documents of the century.

They are genuine documents relating to something else which Roscoe White was involved in.

They are not authentic.

In any complex allegation about the assassination (from the Warren Report to "Best Evidence") there will be certain elements which do not fit, and which can plausibly be discarded as honest mistakes or misinterpretations. I want to emphasize my opinion that these cables can't be treated as just one part of the story, which you can take or leave as you like. If they are phony, it has implications for the entire story and the way it has been presented.

I suppose it is possible that they were fabricated in 1963 so that Roscoe, the real assassin, would appear to be linked to Naval Intelligence, thus protecting others who were his real bosses. But the most likely possibility is that they were fabricated well after the assassination, as "evidence" that Roscoe and ONI/CIA were behind the assassination.

Thus, throughout, it is worth keeping in mind that if there is a hoax, there is a hoaxer. (Hoch's Law?)

Unlike evidence subject to several interpretations (like the autopsy report), there is no fundamentally innocent explanation for fake documents.

My current feeling is that the cables are forgeries, and that the leading candidates for the forger include Roscoe White himself.

As Bob Katz says, "In a way, this reminds me of the old Clifford Irving - Howard Hughes hoax, where someone knows enough about an actual case to throw on an overlay of so-called facts." (#12)

On the authenticity issue, there are contextual and technical arguments. At the moment, the former are the most compelling.

Could someone give me any plausible scenario in which these cables would be sent to a gunman by his control?

Particularly the last one. Put yourself in the plotters' shoes. JFK and Oswald are dead, the authorities seem to believe that all the hits were from the TSBD, and nobody is looking for a second gunman. White has already spent some time in a safehouse (his son now says), where he would presumably be given instructions at least as specific as these. (Alternatively, as Blakey has argued, any second gunman would probably have been at the bottom of Lake Ponchartrain within days.) But for some reason you want to tell White to stay cool. You don't trust the phone or the mail, but for some reason you're not worried about leaving a paper trail in Washington and Dallas, so you send a cable using the same channel you used for pre-assassination instructions.

Give me a break!

The other cables also sound phony to me. The text calls for a little critical analysis - "deconstruction"? What information is actually being conveyed? Could they be made to sound plausible even in a docudrama?

If I were ever devious, I would employ circumlocutions. Would you ever refer in writing to actions by your own people as coming in to "cover up"?

The reference to the "National Security threat to world peace" reminds me of a document allegedly found by Sherman Skolnick many years ago, supposedly a National Security Council order for the elimination of JFK on such grounds. That document (which I have never seen) sounded phony too.

What about the technicalities? Can someone tell me how cable traffic moved in 1963? Would Roscoe have some sort of radio receiver and teletype at his house? Was the message sent through the Dallas Police?

Incidentally, two of the cables are dated by month and year, but not day. Very unusual, but a forger might see that making disproof more difficult.

Golz quotes Bobby Inman (formerly director of ONI and deputy directory of CIA) as saying that the format was not like anything he had seen before, and that none of the three-character codes names in the headings mean anything.

On the other hand, John Stockwell "sees a '90 to 95 percent probability' that they are genuine," although he cannot discount the possibility of "an elaborate hoax." Stockwell "has interviewed [Ricky] White personally and spent two months analyzing his 'evidence.'" (#12) Despite the quality of his book on his own CIA career in Angola, Stockwell has previously associated himself with some of the wilder allegations in the JFK case. Robert Ranftel heard him speak in San Francisco some months ago; the rest of his talk was good but he devoted a substantial part to the JFK case, basically following the Marita Lorenz line. Robert recalls him endorsing Gary Shaw and Jim Marrs, and naming Orlando Bosch and Frank Fiorini/Sturgis as two of the gunmen.

The grassy knoll must have been crowded: Bosch and/or Sturgis, Nicoletti, Sarti, White, badge-man (who I guess could have been White or one of the others in White's uniform) - and I'm sure I have left someone out. As Wallace Milam put it, the critics have now positively identified 12 of the 3 gunmen.

On to some of the other so-called evidence. Again, unless you find the cables a plausible part of an assassination conspiracy, you ought to maintain a skeptical attitude towards all the evidence.

Some of the following information comes from Kevin Walsh, who interviewed Geneva and Ricky White in 1976 for the HSCA (because of the backyard photo; more below). Now a private investigator in Washington, he has done some work on the latest allegations for Jim Lesar.

(1) White and Oswald linked in the Marines?

There is a USMC embarkation slip, allegedly from White's files, which puts him on the USS Bexar with Oswald in 1957, on a long trip from the U.S. to Japan. For more on this trip, see Epstein's "Legend," pp. 65-66, 70; see also WR 683. Do we know how many Marines were on this trip?

The White slip differs from Oswald's (19 WCH 668) in ways which suggest authenticity. The second half of "Yokosuka/Yokohama" is crossed out in each, in slightly different ways. The signatures look consistent but the "P" differs enough to confirm that nobody just copied Oswald's slip.

So, I am inclined to believe that White was on the boat with Oswald, and may well have become acquainted with him then.

Still, it would be worth confirming that the White file in circulation does match the government's copy, and looking for some listing of who was on that trip. (The embarkation slips do not include the Marine's name.)

White is supposedly in one of the known photographs of Oswald with other Marines. That might be subject to a check by, say, the HSCA's forensic anthropologist. If we're talking about the first photo following p. 192 of "Legend," which fits the Golz' description (in #1), the image of "White" is probably not good enough to be checked.)

(2) Geneva White and Ruby?

As far as I know, the only claimed confirmation for her work as a waitress for Ruby is a photograph of the two of them. (She is also said to have admitted - i.e., claimed - such a relationship.) The photo in question has not been widely reprinted. It shows Ruby (chin on hand) looking from several feet away at a woman wearing (inter alia) a very short skirt, high

heels, and (I would guess) a blondish wig. It is in the tabloid Star (#9, p. 23), and I'm told that it appeared (without any identification of the woman) in Time or Newsweek at the time of the 25th anniversary.

Kevin Walsh says she really does look like Mrs. White. Again, an expert analysis seems called for, but I have no real problem with this part of the story.

Authenticity is an issue because (inter alia) of reports that Roscoe enjoyed faking photos. Kevin says that she said in 1976 that Roscoe's mistress, demanding that she grant him a divorce, threatened to produced forged photos showing Geneva in bed with another man. Also, she and Ricky told Kevin that Roscoe put together photos showing his sons flying around the room in their home.

Kevin recalls that the photo appeared with a photo credit a couple of years ago. Its origin should be checked out.

While I can believe that Geneva knew Ruby, I have a lot of trouble with her alleged claim that she overheard an implausible exchange between Roscoe and Ruby: "I will take care of Oswald" and "I will take care of the President and I will take care of Tippit." (#10; I know that Hugh Aynesworth and the Washington Times are not the best sources, of course.)

(3) Roscoe's work for the Dallas Police

As far as I know, it is well established that he joined the DPD in October 1963, as a photographer and clerk, becoming a patrolman in 1964.

For a follow-up article (#4), Earl Golz interviewed four of Roscoe's police academy classmates. They, "including two who rode with him for three months [starting shortly after the assassination] in a car pool, contend he didn't have the emotional fortitude or rifle skills necessary to assassinate [JFK]." Also, one of the four, Wilbur Bernard, is confident that White did not take off four days to hide out, as Roscoe claims.

As far as I know, there is nothing in the Warren Report files about anything he did on November 22. (Someone should check the DPD part of the Texas AG files, as used by Scheim.) The FBI, when they first checked out Ricky's story in 1988, supposedly established that Roscoe was in a different part of Dallas at the time of the assassination. (#1) (FOIA experts: would any FBI records be available? I would like to know what analysis they did on Ricky's physical evidence.)

(4) The backyard photos

The HSCA reported that Geneva White provided a first-generation print of the "third" backyard photo. (I think it first came out at the time of the Schweiker Committee; wasn't it published in "New Times"?) (See 6 HSCA 141-2; this was mentioned in the public hearings - with Roscoe's name [2 HSCA 321] and in "Conspiracy.")

I've always assumed that various DPD officers had just picked up these prints as souvenirs; another such print was later provided by Detective Stovall. Someone apparently got the negative also. Hardly proper, but not an assassination conspiracy.

It would be helpful to see what the HSCA learned from the Whites and Stovall (as well as HSCA files on other things, of course). As Robert Ranftel noted (#13), the HSCA, FBI, and CIA files could be useful in laying to rest various rebuttable allegations.

As far as I know, the latest story does not include any claim that Roscoe helped the DPD forge these photos of Oswald. If you are convinced that the photos are fakes, you have to wonder about Roscoe's possible role. Personally, I think the photos are real: the original photogrammetric

arguments for inauthenticity (going back to 1964) were never done well enough to convince me; the photos are plausible and interesting enough if genuine; and I was impressed by the technical competence and apparent sincerity of the HSCA panel.

We can be fairly sure, by the way, that the third photo dates back to 1963, since the Warren Commission got (and published) the DPD "reconstruction" showing an officer in a pose matching only that photo. (Which CE is it?)

(5) Roscoe and military intelligence

Ricky has supposedly said that his father worked for intelligence while in the Marines and afterwards. I guess he's as good a candidate for a secret intelligence connection as Oswald. But I know of no evidence for one.

Back to one of the possible explanations of the cables: hypothetically, Roscoe could have been leading a secret intelligence-related life while on the police force. Suppose, say, ONI needed to investigate a report that some DPD officers had been trying to get secret information by, say, pressuring homosexual employees at a major Navy supplier in Dallas. (I'm making this all up, remember.) Maybe they would want to put their own man on the force, and after the assassination they would tell him, through channels, that they were going to cover up misleading evidence.

But the earlier cables don't fit such a hypothesis, do they?

For my own reasons, I've been on the lookout for evidence of improper domestic activity by ONI (as we know other military outfits engaged in, at least later in the 1960s). For example, might ONI have been keeping an eye on Oswald? But I haven't come up with anything.

Still, Kevin suspects that if Roscoe's story gets us anywhere, it will be in relation to military intelligence. Any ideas?

(7) The Mexico Mystery Man

I think this hasn't been reported, but Ricky claims that one of his father's friends is the unidentified man in the Mexico City CIA photos. Kevin says that Ricky falsely told him that the man (whose initials are PDJ) admitted being the man in the photos (who is generally regarded, on insufficient evidence, as an Oswald impostor). In any event, Kevin has interviewed PDJ, who does not and did not look like the mystery man; PDJ dismissed Ricky's story.

(6) Roscoe's actions after the assassination.

Most of Ricky's story is based on an alleged diary that he no longer has. I find it more plausible that Marilyn Monroe kept a diary about the Kennedys which disappeared right after her death than that a grassy-knoll gunman kept one which did not disappear for 25 years.

My most plausible explanation so far involves thinking of Roscoe as neither a gunman nor an Easterling (i.e. possessed by a total fiction), but as someone like Kerry Thornley or even George DeMohrenschildt.

Recall that Thornley really did know Oswald quite well in the Marines, and was writing about him before the assassination. He was quite rational when he testified to the Warren Commission. He published his Oswald novel, which is quite coherent. Later, he got caught up in the controversy, both as a target of the Jim Garrison fiasco and (maybe before, maybe later) as an acquaintance of David Lifton (and maybe other critics). Eventually, he went quite over the edge, both personally and in terms of his conspiratorial analyses.

I could believe that Roscoe became obsessed by the coincidences linking him to the assassination - the Bexar trip, his wife and Ruby. He may well

have tried to make sense of it all, incorporating information from the critical literature. (It is a coincidence that Ricky knows, from the dairy, so much about the origin of the shots? Or that one gunman was code-named Sol (or Saul?), as in the McDonald book? (Roscoe was "Mandarin; the third was "Lebanon." Oswald was in the plot but not a gunman.)

But maybe there was no sense to be made. Coincidences do happen; that's why they call them coincidences. The medium for Roscoe's personal reconstruction may have looked like a diary; maybe he meant it to be, say, a private document, or even a screenplay. (Everyone is a potential writer, right?).

So even if the diary existed, it may not have been intended as truth. I think it is fantasy. As David Lifton put it, we could be hearing Roscoe spinning tall tales from the grave.

Also, Roscoe may have been involved in something bad in November 1963, perhaps even something related to Oswald or the assassination, but far from being a gunman.

For example, I have always found it plausible that Oswald thought that some of his activities were on behalf of some police or intelligence agency, and maybe they really were. Certainly his interest in the ACLU is consistent with the DPD's official view of that group as subversive. Perhaps White was doing some undercover work in his first year as a cop - new employees, being unknown, are good candidates. Perhaps he was working in parallel with Oswald, or even with him.

If Roscoe was a gunman, where's the payoff? I think he would have been either dead or rich (and out of the country) in short order, not left to lead the rather poor and unhappy (and perhaps desperate) life that we know of. (He died in 1971, pre-HSCA but post-Garrison).

By the way, I'm told that there are striking resemblances between White's story and William Gemelo, a key (pseudonymous) character in Robert Morrow's 1976 book, "Betrayal." (Does anyone want to check that, and figure out what it might mean?)

How the story got here, and where it goes next:

The massive media reaction might be due to the placement of Earl Golz's story (which is not critical enough, but not uncritical) on the front page of the Sunday paper. The backers include the AIC (Gary Shaw, Larry Harris, Larry Howard) and Bud Fensterwald, who held a press conference in Dallas. Larry Howard has been working with White for a year and a half and "I've never been so convinced of anything in my life." (#5)

The Texas critics are reportedly seriously split on this story. One report is that Gary Mack will revive "Coverups" for a critical look at it. David Lifton says that things got pretty nasty during a radio appearance including him, Ricky, and Groden.

As suggested above, one can dismiss the story as fantasy without impugning Ricky's sincerity. Complicating the assessment of White's good faith is the presence of a number of people among his supporters who are either relatively unknown as critics to the rest of the community, or who are obviously pursuing the case with various goals in mind. My impression, over a year ago, was that some of the newer critics now involved with this story were overly confident that some money and effort would lead to the names of the gunmen; the old guard was much less confident that a "solution" could be found.

The list of participants includes Rev. Jack Shaw (no relation to Gary or Clay), who supposedly heard Roscoe's deathbed confession (and much more). There is also a substantial cast of agents (literary, not intelligence), and

(shades of Jim Garrison) a group of seven Midland oil businessmen. Doing business as Matsu Corp., they have spent more than $100,000 on the "investigation," including expenses and maybe a salary to Ricky, and negotiations to sell the rights to Ricky's story. "Oliver Stone is interested, but no deal has been made," [Matsu president Gary] Baily said." (#2)

Also among the critics endorsing Ricky's story are Bob Groden, Bob Dorff, Bob Cutler, and (reportedly) Mark Lane. Jim Garrison said that "There is the possibility that this is valid because there are so many points where this kind of statement... usually veers off into unbelievability." [I didn't know he had noticed!] "This statement continues to ring true."

On May 11, Gary Shaw and Joe West held a press conference to name the assassins in Galveston, known among some critics as "the shot heard 'round the immediate vicinity." A source (not present at the press conference) claimed personal knowledge resulting from his own work in organized crime, including his own investigation, at the direction of "the commission," to find out who killed JFK. He named Charles Nicoletti as the gunman, with Johnny Roselli himself patrolling the parking lot. These two met the night before with Sam Giancana and Jack Ruby at the Cabana Motel in Dallas. (Sure!) (#17)

For what it's worth, Rev. Shaw says that Geneva White picked a photo of Nicoletti out of nearly a dozen and identified him as the organized crime figure who "approached her in New Orleans in 1971 and told her to deliver a warning to her husband."

Rev. Shaw's credibility is an important question and, as far as I know, should not be assumed.

Fensterwald and Gary Shaw have already met with Texas AG Jim Mattox. "Mattox said he hasn't decided yet what to do, but that his office has jurisdiction. 'The Attorney General can investigate anything,' he said." (#3) Mattox is a lame duck so the possibility of another Garrison is slim.

"Mattox said... he is interested in pursuing the White story because he was once told by his mother, a waitress at Campisi's Egyptian Restaurant in Dallas, that Ruby frequents the restaurant and she thought she saw Ruby and Oswald eating dinner there once." (#2)

As far as I know, Fensterwald and Shaw really want Mattox to investigate the White story, not just other, more plausible, leads.

I guess my own list of things for the Texas AG to investigate would include the alleged absence of DPD information on Oswald, despite the publicity given to his return from Russia; the unlikely police reaction to the alleged literature distribution in Dallas in Spring 1963 (documented only by post-assassination police memos which I have trouble believing were not based on earlier documents); the DPD interest in the ACLU; DPD connections to federal intelligence agencies and (if any) to Sen. Dodd's investigation of mail-order gun sales; Connally's correspondence with Oswald; Col. Jones and the whole Army Intelligence story; the possible detailing of Texas reservists or military to assist the Secret Service.

But Roscoe White wouldn't rate very high on my list.

And if some of us have been taken in by a fraud, it would be better for us to expose it (at best, in a story by Earl Golz) than for it to be established by the Texas AG's office.

SOURCES:

Stories by Earl Golz in the Austin American-Statesman:

1. 5 Aug 90 (5 pp.) "Nov. 22, 1963: Another story blurs the facts; son of Dallas cop says dad was 1 of 3 who shot Kennedy"

2. 7 Aug (2 pp.) "Dallas cop's son rolls out JFK theory; Mattox, CIA, Hollywood answer conspiracy claim" Covers the press conference,
3. 8 Aug (1 p.) "Mattox urged to open JFK assassination inquiry"
4. 9 Aug (2 pp.) "Classmates doubt 'run-of-the-mill' cop gunned down JFK"

Other accounts:
5. AP in Houston Post, 6 Aug
6. AP in Oakland Co., MI Press, 7 Aug
(I've got several other versions of the AP stories; I think these are the longest. Thanks to all who sent these clippings; they often differ.)
7. George Haj, USA Today, 7 Aug
8. Paul Weingarten, Chicago Tribune, in Detroit Free Press, 7 Aug
(Items 6-8 headline the CIA denial, but include more.)
9. Star (Tabloid), 28 Aug; includes photos not in previous items

Articles featuring critical commentary:
10. Hugh Aynesworth, Washington Times, 7 Aug. Aynesworth (a long-time anti-conspiracy expert who has sometime been right before) heard, and rejected, a less comprehensive version from Ricky earlier this year. Allegedly, nothing was then said about a dairy, Roscoe killing Tippit, or Geneva's overheard conversation.
11. Jerry Urban, Houston Chronicle, Aug 7. "Man may profit from JFK plot allegations"
12. Joseph Kahn, Boston Globe, 11 Aug, 2 pp. "Fueling the who-killed-JFK fire" Quotes Carl Oglesby, Bob Katz, John Stockwell, Robert Gardiner [Ranftel]. Oglesby suggests that if Ricky is "not behind the hoax, one of those Midland people [maybe] saw the possibility of weaving a story some dumb Yankee would pay big bucks for."
13. Warren Hinckle, S. F. Examiner, 19 Aug. "JFK assassination: Wherein lies truth?" Hinckle doesn't really say, but he quotes Robert Raftel [Ranftel], "no conspiracy monger," who tried to focus his attention on the unreleased HSCA-related files.
14. Steve Blow, Dallas Morning News, 8 Aug. "JFK theory sinks in murk off deep end" An impressionistic account of White, Fensterwald et al. at the August 6 Dallas press conference.

Newsletters:
15. Grassy Knoll Gazette (Sep 90), 4 pp. Bob Cutler is pretty sure White (and his wife) and the AIC people are honest and deserve support, but if they "turn out to be liars and fast-buck artists GKG goes down the same damn drain."
16. Ted Gandolfo, "Assassination U.S.A.," "Very special August 7, 1990 edition." "Jim Garrison vindicated again." (2 pp. plus 3 pp. of AP clips and typed copies of the cables.)
17. "Conflict: The Dorff Report," May 1990, pp. 10-11. As noted above, this describes the precursor Jack West story naming Nicoletti, not the White story.

TV and radio coverage: there was lots; I fortunately missed it. If you have something which is worth circulating, I would much prefer transcripts or summaries to accompany (or substitute for) any tapes you send me.

Thanks to everyone who has sent clippings (David Bryson, Phil Melanson, and several others) and to Kevin Walsh, David Lifton, and Robert Ranftel for useful conversations.

Paul L. Hoch